

Investigating managers in Hungary - What is their knowledge sharing like?

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Why do people share their knowledge? Who and what inspires them to do it especially within organizations in Hungary and in Central-Eastern Europe? The objective of this paper is to gain an understanding of knowledge sharing. After the introduction of the importance of sharing knowledge, a brief description will be given of knowledge sharing and its drivers and barriers. This is followed by an account of knowledge sharing research (International Mapping of Knowledge Sharing Excellence) conducted by the University of Pannonia, Department of Management and Alcoa Foundation. The paper ends with a short conclusion about the initial test results of the research.

Keywords: knowledge, knowledge sharing, culture, leadership

1 The growing importance of knowledge sharing

In the rise of the new knowledge economy - that is driven by globalization, rapidly changing information and communication technology - knowledge has become one of the most valuable resources. The emergence of this new economy was predicted by the world's best-known forecasters of social change, too [11]. We should also accept that an individual cannot possess all knowledge and knowledge cannot be hoarded like gold where the value increases the longer it is held.

The sharing of knowledge has an important feature: it stays in the organizations long after the employees leave it. Thus leaders of organizations should be aware of this and recognize that the old paradigm "knowledge is power" cannot exist in these days any more. Accordingly, leaders ought to find ways to motivate, encourage colleagues to achieve the new paradigm of the XXI. century which is "sharing knowledge is power" [5].

1.1 Why to share knowledge?

The reason why knowledge sharing is becoming an increasingly important tool is that it can be used to promote decision-making. Taking this fact into consideration one of the most important task for the leader is to help employees see that knowledge sharing is not only in interest of the organization but also their personal interest.

Knowledge sharing will become realistic in the organization if employees understand that sharing what they know can support them in doing their jobs more effectively, to retaining their jobs and helping their personal development [7].

Furthermore the wider understanding of organizational interests, global situation and processes could also help employees to contribute better to the organization's competitive position and to manage and sharing knowledge [2].

1.2 Difference between knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing

It is crucial to know what knowledge is, before dealing with the different approaches to knowledge sharing. Knowledge is taken by Sveiby as *"the capacity to act"*¹. Davenport's and Prusak's view is that knowledge is *"broader, deeper, and richer than data or information"*².

It is also essential to differentiate between knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing. While knowledge transfer is *"largely a one-way process"*, knowledge sharing is more optimal because it *"focuses on a two-way process, in which each partner has access to skills and competencies of their partners and suggests an equally beneficial flow of information"*³.

1.3 Drivers and barriers of knowledge sharing

According to Appleyard [1] firms dealing with knowledge sharing activities enjoy the following benefits: the ability to refine strategic plans, coordinate on industry standards, and develop inclusion in professional networks. Clearly

¹ Sveiby, K. E. 1997. The New Organizational Wealth: Managing & Measuring Knowledge-based Assets, San Fransisco: Berrett-Koehler, pp. 37.

² Davenport T. H. & Prusak L. 1998. Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, MA, pp. 199.

³ Mohannak, K: Knowledge Management: Towards a Cross-Cultural and Institutional Framework, in Knowledge Management: Innovation, Technology and Cultures, in Proceedings of 2007 International Conference on Knowledge Management, Vol. 6, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2007, pp. 39.

defined and meaningful objectives, visible support of senior management, strong team leadership, high level of trust and shared rewards can also be conditions under which people are willing to share their knowledge [8].

Besides the drivers of knowledge sharing the awareness of the barriers of knowledge sharing is important, too. The following types of barriers hindering the sharing of knowledge within an organization are differentiated by Davenport and Probst [6].

	Personal barriers	Collective barriers	Structural barriers	Polital/Cultural barriers
A	Don not know what others need to know.	Transfer process not well organized.	Keep best practices in division.	No common language.
B	Too much time and effort involved.	In-house competition.	Feel that knowledge kept to oneself will help with careere success.	Competition between units.
C	No obvious benefits or rewards.	Mangers are not supportive of initiative.	Time pressure – could be the wrong people doing the job.	Not rewarded financially or by promotion. (“Who cares?” attitude)
D	Lack of confidence in knowledge development.	Poor corporate culture of promotion of best practice sharing.	Poor IT structures.	Poor corporate culture

Table 1
The barriers of knowledge sharing

2 Knowledge Sharing Research at University of Pannonia, Department of Management

Over the last decades, numerous journals, devoted to knowledge management, have been created. Most of these published works comprise of conceptual and theoretical models and rely primarily on a small number of descriptive exploratory qualitative case studies and only few quantitative empirical researches have been published [10].

Beyond studies focusing mainly on the regions of the USA, Japan and Western Europe, there is barely any research work focusing on knowledge sharing in Central-Eastern Europe.

The fact that there has not been any scientific research carried out in Hungary, which measured managers, working under top manager, concerning their knowledge sharing increases the importance of this research.

The Knowledge Sharing Research (International Mapping of Knowledge Sharing Excellence) at University of Pannonia, Department of Management addresses this research gap.

In this article, I outline this Research, the main purpose of which was to conduct a quantitative survey to be able to create a broader set of evidence regarding knowledge sharing.

This Research reveals the factors which affect the maturity of knowledge sharing of managers, working under top managers, at medium- and large sized enterprises in Hungary and also in Central-Eastern Europe and measures the role of these managers in the maturity of knowledge sharing.

2.1 International Mapping of Knowledge Sharing Excellence

In 2006 University of Pannonia, Department of Management joined forces with the Alcoa Foundation in order to investigate the knowledge sharing of managers. Therefore, a detailed survey - “International Mapping of Knowledge Sharing Excellence” - was conducted.

The model of this research proposes that on the one hand there is the organisation itself with different kinds of features and on the other hand the manager as an individual, who owns different kinds of knowledge sharing competences influencing the maturity of knowledge sharing.

These factors were revealed through interviews with managers from companies and consultants. Accordingly, the organizational aspect of our model contains influencing factors like corporate culture, organizational relations, knowledge management programs, and leadership. In the individual aspect competences, helping the sharing of knowledge are grouped into methodology, social, personal, professional competences.

A questionnaire was composed based on this model, which was tested by sending it to Hungarian maintenance managers. Questionnaires were sent to Hungarian managers working in other fields as well, allowing for the comparison of the results.

2.2 Participants of the research

The empirical survey consisted of 55 respondents. More than 40 % of them were maintenance managers, and about 60 % contained managers working in other fields.

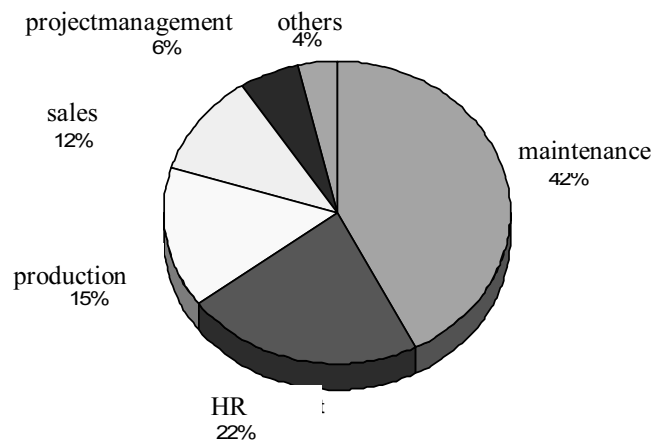


Figure 1
Participants of the research

In remaining part of this article, I present the initial test results of the research.

2.3 Corporate culture and maturity of knowledge sharing

The Competing Values Framework of Cameron and Quinn [3] was used to examine the corporate culture of the investigated managers. This Framework proposes that dimensions; such as flexibility, discretion – stability, control and internal focus, integration – external focus, differentiation; allow for four culture types to be distinguished. These culture types are Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy. This Framework also enables the mapping the present and preferred culture types of organizations.

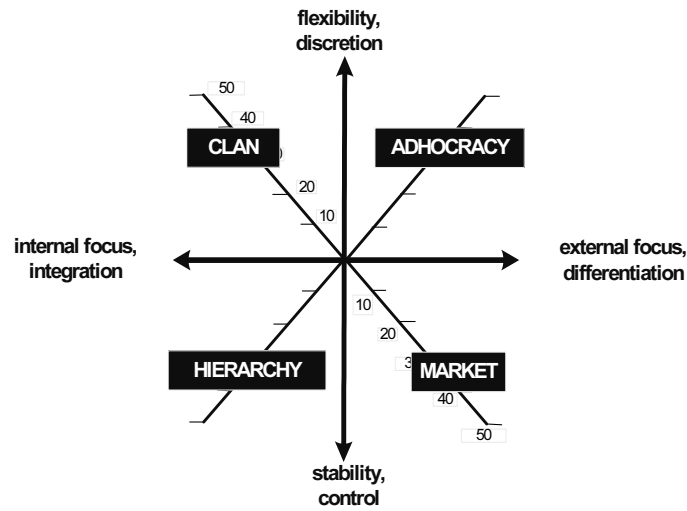


Figure 2

The Competing Values Framework - Corporate Culture types [4]

The following diagrams show the present and the preferred culture types of the examined managers.

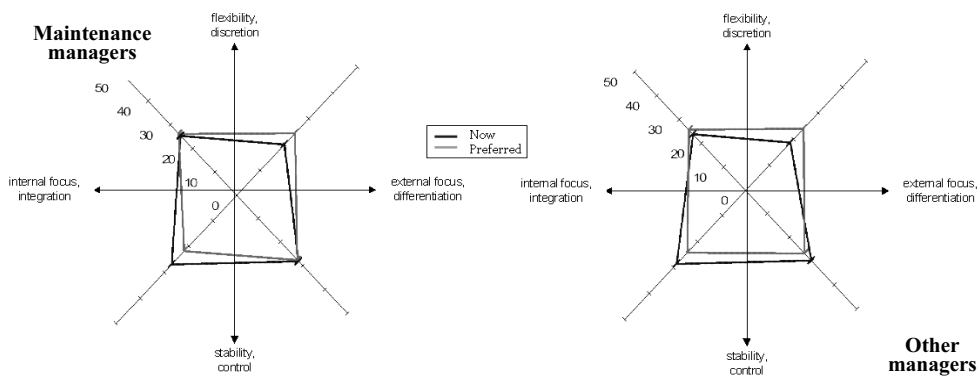


Figure 3

Present and preferred culture type of the examined managers

The present culture types are very similar to each other, because Market and Hierarchy cultures dominant in both cases. However the figures show that while maintenance managers would prefer a culture with mainly Market dominance, other (not maintenance) managers would prefer a culture where no dominating culture type can be found.

During the research we also wanted to know how mature knowledge sharing is within the present dominant culture types, but maturity of knowledge sharing

could not be analysed at Adhocracy culture, because it did not emerge as a dominant culture among either of the groups of investigated managers.

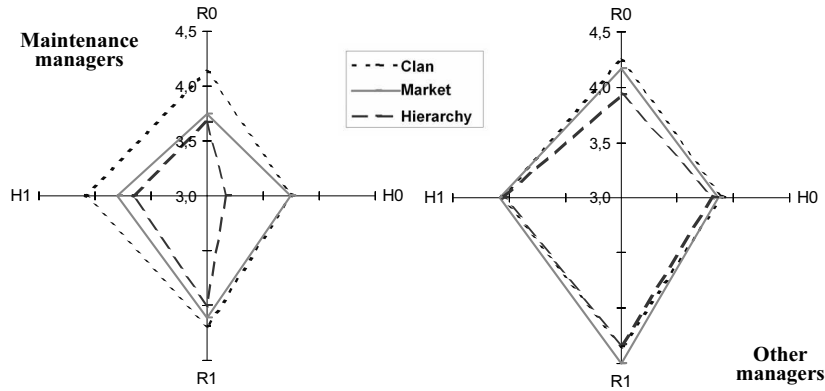


Figure 4
Maturity of knowledge sharing at different culture types

Comparing the managers, it can be seen that maturity of knowledge sharing is lower among maintenance managers not only on the whole and but also in each culture types.

2.4 Leadership style and maturity of knowledge sharing

In connection with leadership Hersey and Blanchard's [9] Situational Leadership style was used, in which four leadership styles can be distinguished, depending on the extent of focus on tasks and relationships.

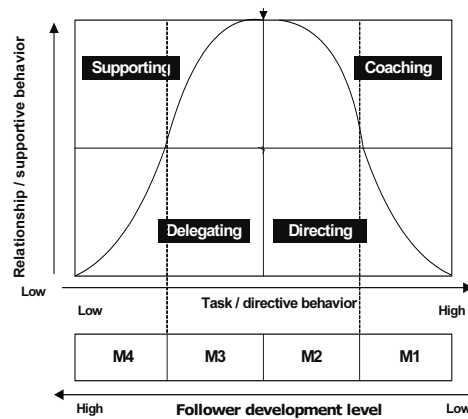


Figure 5
Situational Leadership style

According to this leadership theory a leader should also adapt his leadership style to the followers' maturity. As the maturity of the followers' increases, the task focus of the leader decreases [9].

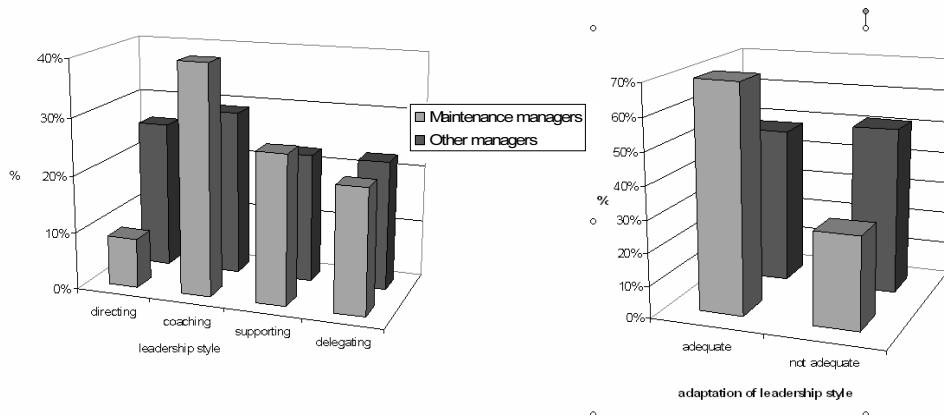


Figure 6-7
Leadership styles used ; Adaption of leadership style to the followers' maturity

The first diagram shows that there are big differences in leadership style used by maintenance managers compared to other managers. While almost 40 % of maintenance managers use coaching leadership style, there are only small differences in the four leadership styles used by other managers.

The right hand side figure (7. Figure) shows that most of maintenance managers adapt their leadership style to the followers' maturity, while only about 50% of other managers do the same.

Maturity of knowledge sharing of these managers in each leadership style was also examined.

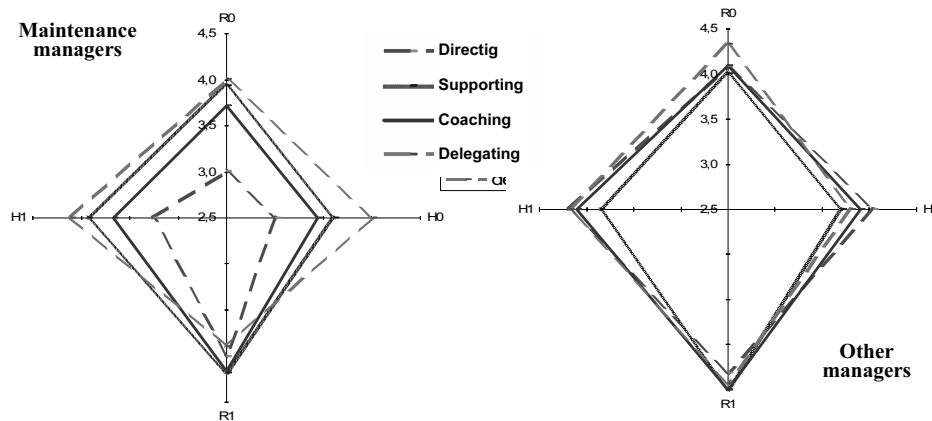


Figure 8
Maturity of knowledge sharing at different leadership styles

The figures show that maturity of knowledge sharing is not only much higher among other managers but also there are only small differences in the maturity of knowledge sharing among these managers compared to maintenance managers.

Conclusion

The first organizational efforts to manage knowledge concentrated on using information technology solutions, which often failed to achieve their objectives because they did not think of cultural factors that are also critical. The leaders of these organizations ought to find ways to integrate knowledge management (knowledge sharing) into their strategic vision and build a knowledge sharing culture that supports knowledge sharing and motivates employees to share their knowledge.

The International Mapping of Knowledge Sharing Excellence Research has shown that there are differences in the maturity of knowledge sharing of managers within different culture types and leadership styles.

This brief paper has not answered all the questions but has introduced a piece of Hungarian Research with suggestions for future investigation.

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